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Ornithological Observations accepts papers containing faunistic information about birds. This includes descriptions of distribution, behaviour, breeding, foraging, food, movement, measurements, habitat and plumage. It will also consider for publication a variety of other interesting or relevant ornithological material: reports of projects and conferences, annotated checklists for a site or region, specialist bibliographies, and any other interesting or relevant material.

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SPOTTED EAGLE-OWL NESTING ON TOP OF SOCIABLE WEAVER NEST

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The Spotted Eagle-Owl *Bubo africanus* is known to nest mostly on level surfaces, on a steep slope or a rocky cliff and even old stick nests or pile of flood debris (Kemp 2005a). The only other owl species which is known to use large stick nests of birds such as Sociable Weavers *Philetairus socius*, Red-billed Buffalo-weavers *Bubalornis niger* or Hamerkop *Scopus umbretta* is the Verreaux's Eagle-Owl *B. lacteus* (Kemp 2005b). This note reports on a Spotted Eagle-Owl nest with a chick on top of a Sociable Weaver nest in a Camel Thorn *Vachellia erioloba*¹ in the Hertzogville district, Free State.

During a field trip to the Kalahari thornveld areas of the Hoopstad district, SABAP2 surveys were conducted in "virgin" pentads in the Hertzogville area on 6 December 2013. Remnants of *V. erioloba* woodland occur as far south and west as the Hertzogville and Boshof districts (towards Kimberley in the Northern Cape). In these areas Sociable Weaver nests in *Vachellia* trees and even man-made structures are common.

While atlasing in pentad 2810_2530 I observed a Sociable Weaver nest next to the road at the farm Bothmasrust (S28°10.715'



Fig 1 - The Spotted Eagle-Owl chick in its nest on top of a Sociable Weaver nest at Bothmasrust, Hertzogville, Free State on 6 December 2013.

E25°33.608'). I stopped to photograph the nest for the PHoWN² Virtual Museum. While taking photographs of this nest I noticed an adult owl flying away from a weaver's nest a little way off. On closer inspection I found a single largish owl chick (estimated about 20 days old) standing in an owl's nest (Fig 1).

At first I thought it to be a Verreaux's Eagle-Owl as they are known to

¹ *Vachellia erioloba* previously known as *Acacia erioloba* (Ed.)

² PhoWN = **Photos of Weaver Nests** – a citizen science project of the Animal Demography Unit, Department of Biological Sciences, University of Cape Town – www.vmus.adu.org.za



nest on top of Sociable Weaver nests. More recently this species had been recorded in the Sandveld Nature Reserve area of the Hoopstad area during the current SABAP2 project. However, based on the yellow eye colour and plumage of the chick the possibility of Verreaux's Eagle-owl was ruled out. This record represents the first breeding record of Spotted Eagle-Owl nesting on top of a Sociable Weaver nest.

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References

Kemp AC 2005a. Spotted Eagle-Owl *Bubo africanus* In: Hockey PAR, Dean WRJ, Ryan PG (eds). Roberts - Birds of Southern Africa. VIIth Ed. The Trustees of the John Voelcker Bird Book Fund, Cape Town. pp. 257-258.

Kemp AC 2005b. Verreaux's Eagle-owl *Bubo lacteus* In: Hockey PAR, Dean WRJ, Ryan PG (eds). Roberts - Birds of Southern Africa. VIIth Ed. The Trustees of the John Voelcker Bird Book Fund, Cape Town. pp. 258-259.